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AUTHOR Soler, Mark

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ABSTRACT

This guide summarizes public opinion research on youth and juvenile justice issues from the Building Blocks for Youth focus groups and various national polls. Overall, the public is less fearful about crime than in the past but believes juvenile crime is increasing. There is serious public concern about the effectiveness of the juvenile justice system and what happens to youth in the system. The public holds mixed views about racial stereotypes and crime and is uncertain whether the system acts in a biased manner. Large majorities support measures to remedy unequal treatment of minorities. The public believes that the system should impose consequences on youth who break the law to teach them responsibility. It shows little support for simply incarcerating youth and prefers rehabilitation and treatment programs. Recommendations include acknowledging accountability, emphasizing that it does not necessarily mean incarceration; promoting rehabilitation that includes mentoring, counseling, and meeting with and compensating victims; and informing the public about racial unfairness. The public recommends communicating clear messages, using appropriate messengers such as rehabilitated offenders and their parents and victims of crime, and telling the personal stories of incarcerated youth. The paper presents case examples from Maryland and Louisiana and key dates in juvenile justice. (Contains 11 references.) (SM)

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Building Blocks for Youth

For a fair and effective youth justice system

PUBLIC OPINION ON YOUTH, CRIME AND RACE:
A Guide for Advocates

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President, Youth Law Center

October 2001

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Building Blocks for Youth

PUBLIC OPINION ON YOUTH, CRIME, AND RACE:
A GUIDE FOR ADVOCATES

The *Building Blocks for Youth* initiative has five major components:

- Research on the disparate impact of the justice system on youth of color, on the effects of adult-court transfer legislation in the states, and on the privatization of juvenile justice facilities by for-profit corporations;
- Analyses of decisionmaking at critical points in the justice system, including arrest, detention, adjudication, and disposition;
- Direct advocacy on behalf of youth in the justice system, particularly on issues that disproportionately affect youth of color such as conditions of confinement in jails, prisons, and juvenile facilities; access to counsel and adequacy of representation in juvenile court; and "zero tolerance" and other issues relating to school suspensions and expulsions;
- Constituency-building among African-American, Latino, and Native-American and other minority organizations, as well as organizations in the medical, mental health, legal, law enforcement, child welfare, civil rights, human rights, religious, victim's rights, and domestic violence areas, at the national, state, and local levels;
- Development of communications strategies to provide timely, accurate, and relevant information to these constituencies, public officials, policymakers, the media, and the public.

The partners in the initiative are the Youth Law Center, American Bar Association Juvenile Justice Center, Justice Policy Institute, Juvenile Law Center, Minorities in Law Enforcement, National Council on Crime and Delinquency and Pretrial Services Resource Center.

The initiative is supported by the Annie E. Casey, Ford, Mott, MacArthur, Rockefeller and William T. Grant foundations, the Center on Crime, Communities & Culture of the Open Society Institute, and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and Bureau of Justice Assistance of the U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice or the supporting foundations.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a host of juvenile justice issues have been in the forefront of public debate and policy discussion: racial disparities in the justice system, prosecution of youth in adult criminal court, incarceration of young people in jails and prisons, and effectiveness of prevention and treatment programs. From 1992 to 1997, 47 states and the District of Columbia made their juvenile justice systems more punitive, either by making it easier to prosecute juveniles as adults, by expanding sentencing authority, or by removing confidentiality protections of juvenile court records or proceedings.[1] Yet research has demonstrated that youth prosecuted in adult court actually have higher recidivism rates and commit more serious crimes later than youth in juvenile court.[2] A report by the Surgeon General in January, 2001 dispelled a number of "myths" about youth and violence, including the myths that minority youth are more likely to become involved in violence than other racial or ethnic groups and that "getting tough" with young offenders by prosecuting them as adults will lead to less crime. The report also confirmed earlier research on the effectiveness of a variety of violence prevention programs.[3]

Building Blocks for Youth, a national initiative for a fair and effective youth justice system, issued several reports during 2000 and 2001 on these issues. *The Color of Justice*, by the Justice Policy Institute, found that in California minority youth prosecuted in adult court were much more likely to be sentenced to imprisonment than white youth, even when arrested for similar offenses.[4] *And Justice for Some*, a comprehensive national report by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, found that youth of color are treated more severely than white youth at every stage of the justice system – from arrest to incarceration — even when charged with the same offenses.[5] *Youth Crime/Adult Time*, an in-depth study by Pretrial Services Resource Center of youth prosecuted as adults in 18 of the largest jurisdictions in the country, found racial disparities similar to those in earlier reports, and raised serious questions about the fairness and appropriateness of the process. It found that most determinations to prosecute youth in adult court (85%) were made by prosecutors or legislatures, not by judges; a significant number of youth were charged with non-violent offenses; a majority of youth in the study were released before trial, most within 24 hours of having charges filed, and many were released without bail, all indicating that the charges were not especially serious.[6] In *Drugs and Disparity: The Racial Impact of Illinois' Practice of Transferring Young Drug Offenders to Adult Court*, the study analyzed data from state criminal justice agencies in Illinois and national corrections databases. It reported that Illinois' practice of automatically sending 15 and a 16- year-old youth charged with drug crimes within 1,000 feet of a school or public housing project to adult court has produced one of the most racially disparate outcomes in the nation. Of the 259 youth automatically transferred to adult court from Cook County over a year period, *only one was White*. Over 99% of the Cook County youth automatically transferred to the adult court for drug crimes were minority youth.

Juvenile justice battles are increasingly fought in the court of public opinion. The myth that a new breed of young and violent "super-predators" threatens the nation (also debunked by the Surgeon General's report) may be the most obvious example of a sound bite driving national policy, but it is hardly the only one. The penchant of television news for reporting violent crime prominently and often ("If it bleeds, it leads."), despite seven straight years of decreases in crime in all categories, adds to the problem. In *Off Balance: Youth, Race and Crime in the News*, another *Building Blocks* report, researchers from the Berkeley Media Studies Group and the Justice Policy Institute found that overall media coverage of youth crime is increasing regardless of actual changes in crime and that youth and minorities are over-depicted as criminals in the news media. Consequently despite a 68% decline in youth homicides from 1993 to 1999, 62% of poll respondents in 1999 believed youth crime was up. These data make it even more important that child advocates learn to access the media with messages that will resonate with the public. Advocates for children and youth need to equip themselves to meet these issues.

Information on juvenile justice research, and on effective prevention and treatment programs, is available from a number of sources, including the *Building Blocks for Youth* website, www.buildingblocksforyouth.org. Information on public opinion has not been as readily available, in part because there have been few public opinion polls taking an in-depth look at attitudes toward youth, crime, race, and the justice system.

To address the gap in public opinion research, *Building Blocks for Youth* has responded in several ways. First, it surveyed the available public opinion research on youth and justice issues, such as polls conducted in past years by the Gallup Organization, CBS News, NBC News, CNN, Time, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and the California Wellness Foundation. Second, it convened a series of ten focus groups, two each in Baltimore, Richmond, Chicago, Seattle, and South San Francisco, on youth, crime, and race issues. The groups were separated by gender, race/ethnicity, and education level to facilitate candid discussions.[7] Third, it conducted an extensive national survey on attitudes toward youth crime, the juvenile justice system, the impact of race, and messages, policies, and messengers for change.[8] This public opinion research was undertaken by Belden Russonello & Stewart, a research and communications firm located in Washington, DC.

Other groups have also surveyed on these issues. In anticipation of the 100th anniversary of the first Juvenile Court in Cook County, Illinois, the Children's Court Centennial Committee (CCCC) commissioned Peter Hart Research and Public Opinion Strategies to do a survey in Illinois of adult and youth attitudes about juvenile justice issues. The FrameWorks Institute and the Center for Communications and Community at UCLA prepared a summary and analysis of survey research related to the public's attitudes concerning adolescents, performed a content analysis of the representation of adolescents in television entertainment programming, and conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups during 1999 and 2000.[9]

This advocacy guide summarizes the public opinion research on youth and juvenile justice issues from the *Building Blocks* focus groups and national poll, as well as other polls. Unless otherwise noted, detailed findings discussed below are from the *Building Blocks* poll. After summarizing the public opinion research, this advocacy guide makes recommendations about how advocates can frame the issues in their work (focusing on effective messages and messengers), and how they can use this information in their organizing and advocacy efforts.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH FINDINGS
YOUTH AND JUVENILE CRIME

- The public is less fearful about crime than in the past
- However, the public believes that juvenile crime is increasing
- The public overwhelmingly believes that youth violence is a big problem facing the country
- The concern about youth and crime is evident in the public's reaction to terms used to describe people under the age of 18
- A significant portion of the public associates juvenile crime with youth who are young teenagers
- At the same time, the public is skeptical about depictions of youth and crime in the media
- Contrary to conventional wisdom, the public does not associate juvenile crime primarily with the poor, but instead sees crime as a problem at all socio-economic levels
- The public associates a wide variety of crimes with young people
- The public believes that youth who break the law will commit other crimes in the future, even if youth have no prior record[10]
- The public believes that many factors cause juvenile crime

PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH FINDINGS
YOUTH AND THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

- The public has serious concerns about the effectiveness of the juvenile justice system
- Out of frustration over a broken juvenile justice system, the public supports prosecution of juveniles in adult criminal court for a wide range of offenses
- The public believes that the nature of the offense is much more important than a youth's prior record or age in determining punishment
- The public has great concern about what happens to young people in the justice system
- The public overwhelmingly (90%) supports a focus on prevention and rehabilitation rather than imprisonment, and strongly endorses a variety of rehabilitation programs

RACE AND FAIRNESS

- The public holds mixed and complex views about racial stereotypes and crime
- The public is not certain whether the system acts in a biased manner
- The public is clearly concerned about fairness in the justice system
- Large majorities support measures to remedy unequal treatment of racial minorities
- The public is more aware of economic unfairness in the system
- The public considers racial inequalities and economic unfairness as equally important

PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH FINDINGS
MESSAGES & MESSENGERS

- The public is persuaded by pro-change messages that are practical and that recognize the potential for change of youth in trouble
- The highest percentage of respondents found certain practical messages most convincing, e.g. "A system that does little more than lock up juveniles will lead to more crime, not less."
- A substantial number of respondents also found convincing messages that speak to youths' potential for change such as "Juvenile offenders often have emotional problems and need counseling, not prison."
- For many people, however, negative attitudes toward youth are deeply ingrained
- Messages that appeared to be excuses for criminal conduct were not convincing, such as "Many teenagers who commit crimes were abused and neglected when they were young."
- The public was less convinced by messages that cite statistics
- Much of the public finds convincing those messages that focus on accountability and consequences for young people
- The public does not find the straightforward "public safety" argument, "Locking up juvenile offenders sends a message and will make communities safer" very convincing
- The public supports court-imposed consequences for young offenders that stress responsibility and accountability
- Near majorities believe that certain programs would be very effective for youth, such as requiring and providing professional counseling to juvenile offenders or using 'scared straight' programs in which juveniles who commit crimes visit adult facilities
- The public does not believe that incarceration is effective
- The public also makes clear distinctions among those who carry messages about crime and youth, giving highest credibility to rehabilitated juvenile offenders and victims of crime, high credibility to policy and judges, and least credibility to public officials.

CONCLUSIONS

- The public is ready to support an agenda for juvenile justice reform, but the agenda must be tied to the public's concerns about accountability and fairness.
- The public believes that the juvenile justice system should impose consequences on youth who break the law as a way of teaching them responsibility.
- Imposing accountability and consequences, however, does not necessarily require incarceration.
- The public shows little support for simply locking up young people.
- But the public does not support the "youth excuse" either.
- Instead, the public supports rehabilitation and treatment programs because they recognize that youth have the potential for change and in the long run will make our communities safer.
- The public also cares about fairness. In the Building Blocks poll in early 1999, the public, particularly Whites, reported little awareness of racial unfairness. Nevertheless, if told of unfairness, all segments of the public considered a matter of serious concern.

RECOMMENDATIONS
KEY MESSAGES

- Acknowledge accountability
- Emphasize that accountability does not necessarily mean incarceration
- Frame prevention and rehabilitation as practical responses to concerns about youth crime
- Promote rehabilitation that includes meeting with and compensating victims
- Promote rehabilitation that includes mentoring and counseling
- Inform about racial unfairness
- Link racial unfairness to economic unfairness
- Recognize that racial unfairness is different from ineffectiveness of the system

- Inform about the consequences of prosecution of youth as adults
- Avoid the "youth excuse"
- Don't rely on statistics alone

RECOMMENDATIONS
KEY MESSENGERS

- Put a "face" on the problem through personal stories of incarcerated youth
- Use appropriate messengers such as rehabilitated juvenile offenders and their parents and victims of crime
- Recruit unusual allies such as police, prosecutors and victims organizations

MESSAGING

- Communicate clear and straightforward messages
- Use these messages proactively and look for opportunities to communicate your juvenile justice reform message to the public through the media
- Train the 'messengers' to utilize the key messages in this guide

PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH FINDINGS

YOUTH AND JUVENILE CRIME

- **The public is less fearful about crime than in the past:**

As crime rates have dropped across the country over the past seven years, the public is somewhat less fearful about crime. Thus, the percentage of the public that believes that *overall* crime is increasing has actually decreased significantly over the past seven years. A CBS and *New York Times* poll in 1994 found that 73% of the public believed that crime was increasing, but that dropped to 51% in 1996 and to 38% in the *Building Blocks* poll in 1999. Correspondingly, only 3% of the public believed that crime was *decreasing* in 1994, but that rose to 26% in 1999.

- **However, the public believes that juvenile crime is increasing:**

A substantial majority of the public believes that *juvenile* crime is increasing. A 1995 CBS News and *New York Times* poll found that 84% believed juvenile crime was increasing, compared to only 2% that believed juvenile crime was decreasing. By 1999, 62% still believed that juvenile crime was increasing, and only 8% believed that juvenile crime was decreasing. The FrameWorks research found that the public believes that youth today are "different" from youth in the past, i.e., that today's teens have rejected traditional American values and are "selfish" and "materialistic."

- **The public overwhelmingly believes that youth violence is a big problem facing the country:**

Women are more likely to see youth violence as a big problem than men, and people of color are more likely to see it as a big problem than Whites, but the concern cuts across all categories: gender, race/ethnicity, education level, income level, political party, area of the country, and whether respondents live in cities, suburbs, or rural areas.

- **The concern about youth and crime is evident in the public's reaction to terms used to describe people under the age of 18:**

In the *Building Blocks* poll, the terms "youth" and "young people" elicited strongly positive reactions and little in the way of negatives. "Teenagers" also brought much more positive reaction than negative (although the FrameWorks poll found strongly negative associations to the word). In the *Building Blocks* poll, public reaction to "kids" was about equally positive or neutral, with somewhat less negative reaction. But the term "juvenile" was strongly negative: three times as many people saw it as negative as saw it positive. From the focus groups it was evident that the term "juvenile" is associated with "juvenile delinquent," and therefore carries a very negative image.

- **A significant portion of the public associates juvenile crime with youth who are young teenagers:**

Two fifths of respondents thought of juvenile crime in connection with 13-15 year olds, and almost half associated crime with 16 and 17 year olds.

- **At the same time, the public is skeptical about depictions of youth and crime in the media:**

The public suspects that media coverage of violent juvenile crime paints a distorted picture. This was clear in both the *Building Blocks* and FrameWorks focus groups.

- **Contrary to conventional wisdom, the public does not associate juvenile crime primarily with the poor, but instead sees crime as a problem at all socio-economic levels:**

Roughly equal numbers of the public believe that juvenile crime is committed by poor youth and by middle-class youth. Indeed, in the *Building Blocks* poll, one-third of the respondents volunteered the answer that juvenile crime is committed by youth of all economic classes. The CCCC poll found similar opinions.

- **The public associates a wide variety of crimes with young people:**

Drug offenses were the most common response, with about one quarter, followed in order by theft and stealing, vandalism, robbery, shoplifting and petty theft, murder, burglary, car theft and joy-riding, shootings and stabbings, and assault and battery. Overall, more respondents identified youth with non-violent crimes (drugs and property offenses such as theft and burglary) than violent crimes (shootings, stabbings, robbery). Respondents cited the least serious crimes (drugs, vandalism, shoplifting) more than twice as often as the most serious offenses such as murder.

- **The public believes that youth who break the law will commit other crimes in the future, even if youth have no prior record:**

Almost 20% believe a youth is "almost certain" to re-offend, another 50% believe a youth will "probably" re-offend. Significantly, it did not matter whether a youth was Black or White: the percentages for each response was virtually identical.

- **The public believes that many factors cause juvenile crime:**

The public believes that the most important cause of juvenile crime is "lack of strong families." In addition, the public listed, in descending order of importance: drugs, no sense of right and wrong, gangs, immaturity and bad judgment, availability of guns, television and movie violence, poverty, and poor schools. Earlier polls by news organizations made similar findings.

YOUTH AND THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

- **The public has serious concerns about the effectiveness of the juvenile justice system:**

4 in 10 rate the juvenile justice system as "poor" or "very poor" and an equal percentage rate it "fair." Only 1% rated it "excellent." The public overwhelmingly describes the system as overburdened, too lenient, and unable to change young people. A 1994 Gallup poll found similar beliefs. The CCCC poll also found that the juvenile court is not viewed as making a major contribution to helping children in trouble. The public is fearful of juvenile crime and believes that the juvenile justice

system does not hold youth accountable for their actions. The public believes that the system lets delinquent youth back on the streets too easily, without rehabilitation to turn their lives around.

- **Out of frustration over a broken juvenile justice system, the public supports prosecution of juveniles in adult criminal court for a wide range of offenses:**

Focus groups reveal that the public does not understand what it means to prosecute a young person as an adult (e.g., that youth can be held in adult jails), but the clear feeling is that adult prosecution carries a more certain imposition of consequences than juvenile court. Earlier polls found similar attitudes.

- **The public believes that the nature of the offense is much more important than a youth's prior record or age in determining punishment:**

In the *Building Blocks* poll, almost two-thirds said that the most important factor in setting punishment is the type of crime committed.

- **The public has great concern about what happens to young people in the justice system:**

More than half of respondents in the *Building Blocks* poll rated the following concerns as "extremely serious" and another 30% rated them as "somewhat serious":

(1) The juvenile justice system is housing youth in dirty, dangerous, overcrowded facilities.

(2) Too many juvenile offenders are housed in facilities with adult inmates.

(3) Wealthy juveniles are less likely to be locked up than are poor juveniles for committing the same crime.[11]

- **The public overwhelmingly (90%) supports a focus on prevention and rehabilitation rather than imprisonment, and strongly endorses a variety of rehabilitation programs:**

The *Building Blocks* poll found that among rehabilitation methods, the public heavily favors those that emphasize responsibility and accountability: meeting with victims and compensating victims. More than half also favor mentoring programs and community service, and nearly half support counseling and "scared straight" programs. Only 15% thought that locking youth up in juvenile facilities is very effective in rehabilitating them. Earlier polls found majorities (though not as large) supporting prevention over incarceration. The CCCC poll found that a majority is optimistic that offenders, even violent ones, can be rehabilitated. That poll also found that Americans believe that any adult can make a difference in the life of a young person by volunteering time as a mentor, youth group leader, Big Brother or Big Sister, or by becoming a foster or adoptive parent. The FrameWorks research also emphasized the importance of mentoring and guidance for adolescents.

RACE AND FAIRNESS

- **The public holds mixed and complex views about racial stereotypes and crime:**

In the *Building Blocks* focus groups, many, participants talked about Black youth committing crimes. There were considerable differences among participants, depending upon the geographical location, gender, and income level of participants. Some included White youth in their picture of youth crime, others talked primarily about Black youth.

Some participants looked at the matter in terms of socio-economic issues, saying that the problems driving youth toward crime are perhaps worse in the Black community but are the same problems for Blacks and Whites, particularly lack of strong families and feelings of hopelessness. Other participants said that Black youth hold different values than White youth, and that committing crimes is a rite of passage for many Black youth today.

In the national *Building Blocks* poll, when asked the question directly, just over a third (34%) of respondents agreed with the statement "Black juveniles are more likely to commit crime than white juveniles." White and Latino respondents were slightly more likely to agree with the statement; about one-quarter of Black respondents agreed with the statement.

The results were similar with the statement "Black juveniles are more prone to violence than juveniles of other races": 35% agreed overall, the same percentage of White and Latino respondents agreed, and 31% of Black respondents agreed.

For some people, these are two very different questions: the first is a matter of crime statistics and the second may reflect deeply rooted biases. For others, the questions may seem quite similar. As has been noted in connection with public opinion polls regarding voting for Black or Latino vs. White politicians, there may be significant differences between responses to opinion polls and actual behavior.

Another Building Blocks poll question indicated that having a prior offense may override feelings about race. The question presented a scenario of a teenager with no criminal record who stole a car and was caught by the police. For half the respondents, the teenager was identified as White, for the other half as Black. When respondents were asked about the likelihood that hte teenager would commit another crime, the responses were nearly identical: regardless of the teenager's race, 19% were "almost certain" he would commit another crime, about half thought he would "probably" commit another crime, about 20% felt is was "unlikely", and 3% said it was "very unlikely."

- **The public is not certain whether the system acts in a biased manner:**

In the *Building Blocks* poll, respondents were equally split whether the juvenile justice system treats Blacks and Latinos fairly or unfairly. Breaking down the responses by race, however, revealed significant differences: 7 out of 10 Black respondents believed that the system is unfair to both groups, and more than half of Latino respondents believed the system is unfair to Latinos (though not to Blacks). There may be movement on this issue, since this poll was conducted before the

significant media attention to racial profiling (particularly "Driving While Black") and the media coverage of reports on racial disparities in the justice system (including reports by *Building Blocks for Youth*).

- **The public is clearly concerned about fairness in the justice system:**

If told that the justice system does treat Black youth unfairly, the public clearly considers the situation a serious matter: almost half of respondents considered it "extremely serious," and another third considered it "somewhat serious."

- **Large majorities support measures to remedy unequal treatment of racial minorities:**

More than 8 in 10 endorse requiring diversity training for police, prosecutors, and judges, and nearly 7 in 10 support new guidelines for arrest, prosecution, and sentencing to address unequal treatment.

- **The public is more aware of economic unfairness in the system:**

More than three-quarters believe that wealthy youth receive better treatment than poor youth, and more than 8 in 10 consider it a serious issue if they were told that wealthy youth are less likely than poor youth to be locked up for the same crimes.

- **The public considers racial inequalities and economic unfairness as equally important:**

Factor analysis of survey responses indicates that attitudes about racial inequities track closely with attitudes toward economic unfairness: the public considers both to be comparable injustices.

MESSAGES AND MESSENGERS

- **The public is persuaded by pro-change messages that are practical and that recognize the potential for change of youth in trouble:**

As noted above, the public overwhelmingly supports prevention and rehabilitation rather than imprisonment.

- **The highest percentage of respondents found these practical messages most convincing:**

 A system that does little more than lock up juveniles will lead to more crime, not less."

 In the long run, it is less expensive to rehabilitate someone rather than to keep the person in jail or prison."

- **A substantial number of respondents also found convincing messages that speak to youths' potential for change:**

 "Juvenile offenders often have emotional problems and need counseling, not prison."

 "Most juveniles who commit crimes have the potential to be rehabilitated and to change."

- **For many people, however, negative attitudes toward youth are deeply ingrained:**

In the FrameWorks focus groups, adults regularly discounted positive statistics about youth and instead focused on a few negative trends.

- **Messages that appeared to be excuses for criminal conduct were not convincing:**

 "Many teenagers who commit crimes were abused and neglected when they were young."

 "It's only natural for people to make mistakes when they are young."

- **The public was less convinced by messages that cite statistics:**

For example, the public was less convinced by the statistical argument that "ninety-four percent of juveniles arrested are arrested for non-violent crimes." And they gave little credence to the notion that "most juveniles who commit crimes are first time offenders and do not commit another crime."

- **Much of the public also finds convincing those messages that focus on accountability and consequences for young people:**

 "Victims of a crime have a right to see that the offender is punished, no matter how young he or she is."
 "If we react in a tough way the first time a juvenile commits a crime, the juvenile will be less likely to break the law in the future."
 "Locking up juveniles who commit crime is the first step to rehabilitation because it teaches young offenders that there are consequences for their crimes."
 "Locking up juvenile offenders sends a message to other juveniles that will make them think twice before committing a crime."

- **The public does not find the straightforward "public safety" argument very convincing:**

The poll found that the public does not find the "public safety" argument, i.e. "locking up juvenile offenders send a message to the community that we will be safe from crime" very convincing.

- **The public supports court-imposed consequences for young offenders that stress responsibility and accountability:**

For example, majorities believe that the following would be very effective in rehabilitation efforts:

(1) Requiring youth to meet with their victims to understand the impact of their crimes.

(2) Requiring youth to compensate their victims for their loss.

3) Requiring youth participation in mentoring programs with adult role models.

(4) Requiring youth to do community service.

- **Near majorities believe that certain programs would be very effective for youth:**

(1) Requiring and providing professional counseling to juvenile offenders

(2) Using 'scared straight' programs in which juveniles who commit crimes visit adult facilities to see what they are like

- **The public does not believe that incarceration is effective:**

Only 15% said that "locking them up in juvenile facilities" would be very effective for rehabilitation.

- **The public also makes clear distinctions among those who carry messages about crime and youth, giving highest credibility to rehabilitated juvenile offenders and victims of crime, high credibility to police and judges, and least credibility to public officials:**

The public is most likely to listen to those who have been directly involved with the system: rehabilitated juvenile offenders and victims of juvenile crime. Next in line of those the public is likely to listen to are the police and judges. Less likely are the U.S. Department of Justice, prosecutors, television news, and newspapers. Elected officials are the people who the public are *least* likely to listen to for information on juvenile crime, even less likely than the ACLU, which is regularly attacked by politicians as "soft on crime."

CONCLUSIONS

From the *Building Blocks* poll, we can conclude that:

- **The public is ready to support an agenda for juvenile justice reform, but the agenda must be tied to the public's concerns about accountability and fairness.**
- **The public believes that the juvenile justice system should impose consequences on youth who break the law as a way of teaching them responsibility.**
- **Imposing accountability and consequences, however, does not necessarily require incarceration.**
- **The public shows little support for simply locking up young people.**
- **But the public does not support the "youth excuse" either.**
- **Instead, the public supports rehabilitation and treatment programs because they recognize that youth have the potential for change and in the long run will make our communities safer.**
- **The public also cares about fairness. In the *Building Blocks* poll in early 1999, the public, particularly Whites, reported little awareness of racial unfairness. Nevertheless, if told of unfairness, all segments of the public considered a matter of serious concern.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

KEY MESSAGES

Based on the *Building Blocks* poll and earlier polls, certain "key" messages can be effectively utilized with the public:

- **Acknowledge accountability**

Regardless of whether the public is aware of the data showing decreased juvenile crime over the past seven years, the public has a strong belief that juvenile crime is a serious problem, and has a genuine fear of youth violence. The public wants to feel that young people who break the law will face consequences. The public believes that juvenile court often gives youth a slap on the wrist, and consequently the public has little faith that juvenile court will turn youth around.

Accountability is a principle that everyone can embrace, regardless of ideological perspective. Advocates for youth, parents, community organizations, public officials and the police can all support the idea that young people need to be held accountable for their actions, so that they can learn from their misdeeds and understand that wrongdoing carries consequences.

Acknowledging accountability at the beginning of a public presentation has the added benefits of establishing credibility quickly (because it is a reasonable and sensible principle) and disarming potential critics (because it negates the stereotype of mushy-thinking liberals who are only looking for excuses for criminal behavior). Acknowledging accountability also opens up avenues of communication with unusual allies such as police and victims organizations.

- **Emphasize that accountability does not necessarily mean incarceration**

Holding young people accountable does not necessarily mean locking them up. There are many interventions, treatment programs, and placements that impose consequences on youth without relying on incarceration, and the public strongly supports treatment and rehabilitation over incarceration.

Interventions and rehabilitation programs vary in severity and restrictiveness. At one end of the spectrum are performing hours of community service, paying a fine, compensating victims, meeting with victims, and individualized programs such as mentoring, counseling, and alcohol or drug treatment, all of which can be imposed without significant disruption to a youth's daily schedule. Other youth may require after-school programs or other "day reporting centers" that youth attend at specific hours and receive adult supervision. For other youth, it may be appropriate to impose restrictions on their movement and activities through electronic monitoring, home detention, or close supervision from monitors who see or speak with youth several times a day. Still other youth may need residential community-based programs such as group homes or special-needs foster care. Only youth who are truly a danger to themselves or the community should be considered for incarceration, i.e., either detained before their adjudication hearing or committed to an institution as a disposition of their case.

There is abundant information available on the wide range of alternatives to incarceration.

- **Frame prevention and rehabilitation as practical responses to concerns about youth crime**

The public believes that young people have the capacity to change, and that prevention and rehabilitation are clearly preferable to incarceration, but messages are more likely to be effective when they are linked to practical benefits such as:

> *"Most young offenders have the capacity to change for the better."*
>
> *"A system that does little more than lock up juvenile offenders will lead to more crime, not less."*
>
> "Spending money on rehabilitating youth is more cost effective than simply keeping the person in prison."

- **Promote rehabilitation that includes meeting with and compensating victims**

Rehabilitation efforts that include meeting with victims and compensating victims provide effective consequences for young people, promote the principle of accountability, and receive strong support from the public. Such efforts are an important part of the "balanced and restorative justice" model of juvenile justice.

- **Promote rehabilitation that includes mentoring and counseling**

The public supports mentoring and counseling programs, but the public's concern about accountability indicates that such programs may not be sufficient by themselves to gain broad support. Thus, advocates should promote *comprehensive* rehabilitation efforts for youth in trouble, including contact with victims *and* individual mentoring and counseling.

- **Inform about racial unfairness**

The public reports little awareness of racial unfairness in the juvenile justice system, but information about such unfairness strikes at a deeply-held belief that the system should be fair to all youth. This is a core American value. If presented with such information, the public can be moved to action. The public strongly supports diversity training for police, prosecutors, and judges, as well as new guidelines for arrest, prosecution, and sentencing to address unequal treatment.

In providing statistics about racial unfairness, advocates must make it clear that such data measure disparate treatment for the same offense. Thus, the second *Building Blocks* report, *And Justice for Some*, found that African-American youth adjudicated for violent offenses, with no prior admissions to state facilities, were committed to state institutions 9 times as often as White youth adjudicated for violent offenses with no prior admissions. African-American youth adjudicated for drug offenses with no prior admissions were committed to state institutions 48 times as often as White

youth adjudicated for drug offenses with no prior admissions. Similarly, the mean length of stay in state institutions for African-American youth adjudicated for violent offenses was 90 days longer than the mean length of stay for White youth adjudicated for the same offenses. The mean length of stay for Latino youth adjudicated for violent offenses was 150 days longer than the mean for White youth.

This is different from "over-representation." "Over-representation" usually refers to the percentage of minority youth in the general population compared to the percentage of minority youth at a specific point in the justice system. For example, since African-American youth are 15% of the adolescent population but 44% of the population in juvenile detention facilities, there is over-representation of African-American youth in juvenile detention facilities. But those data do not tell us whether African-American youth are treated differently from White youth. It may be that African-American youth commit more serious crimes than White youth, which might account for the over-representation.

Only by comparing (1) what happens to minority youth charged with specific offenses with (2) what happens to White youth charged with the same type of offenses (violent, property, drug or public order offenses) can we determine whether minority youth are treated differently from White youth, and, consequently, whether the system is racially unfair.

Thus, the *Building Blocks* studies report how youth of color are treated more harshly than White youth *for the same crimes* at every critical point in the justice system: detention, formal processing in juvenile court, transfer to adult criminal court, disposition (sentencing), incarceration in juvenile facilities, and incarceration in adult facilities.

The difference between disparate treatment for the same offense and over-representation is critical to presenting messages effectively. If advocates fail to make it clear that racial unfairness involves harsher treatment for the same offense, many in the audience will dismiss the data as evidence that minority youth simply commit more crimes than White youth.

In addition, advocates need to present personal stories of young people of color who have been in the justice system. The public sees young people who have been in the system as highly credible, and personal stories put flesh on the statistics. The Justice Policy Institute's publication, *Second Chances*, featured 25 stories of successful juvenile court graduates, can be utilized as a model in this regard.

- **Link racial unfairness to economic unfairness**

The public's belief that the justice system should treat all youth fairly also collides with the feeling that the system treats poor youth more harshly than wealthy youth for the same crimes. Since poor youth in America are disproportionately youth of color, advocates can link racial unfairness in the justice system with economic unfairness. For example, poor youth are usually represented in juvenile court by public defenders, while wealthy (and many middle-class) youth are

represented by private counsel. In many jurisdictions, public defenders labor under impossible caseloads, sometimes as high as 500 to 1,000 cases. In such circumstances, even the most dedicated, hard-working, and resourceful public defenders cannot provide effective representation.

The third *Building Blocks* report, *Youth Crime/Adult Time*, found that among youth prosecuted in adult criminal court, youth represented by public defenders were less likely to be transferred back to juvenile court or acquitted of the charges than youth represented by private counsel. Thus, many youth of color suffer in two ways: they are treated more harshly in the system than White youth for the same offenses, and they are represented by public defenders who are less able to provide effective representation. These two points are related: many youth end up deeper in the system because their public defenders do not have the resources to mount effective defenses or arrange for community placements.

- **Recognize that racial unfairness is different from ineffectiveness of the system**

Analysis of the *Building Blocks* survey results indicates that the public holds its concerns over effectiveness of the juvenile justice system separately from any concerns about racial fairness. The public wants accountability for young offenders, and it supports rehabilitation programs rather than incarceration, but it sees these issues as distinct from remedies for racial disparities. Consequently, advocates need to address both issues.
The two issues are related, and advocates can make the connection. An effective juvenile justice system sees each youth as an individual. It holds each individual youth accountable for his or her own actions, and it applies consequences that are appropriate to the individual youth. That promotes rehabilitation of the youth, and ultimately promotes public safety by helping the youth become a productive citizen in our society. An effective juvenile justice system does not treat individual youths as members of a racial or ethnic group – it does not arrest or detain or adjudicate youth because of how some members of the group behave. Thus, advocates should promote an effective juvenile justice system as a means of focusing on each youth individually and avoiding stereotypes about youth of color. Remedies to combat stereotyping – such as diversity training and development of new guidelines for police and prosecutors – promote a juvenile justice system in which each youth is judged individually.

- **Inform about the consequences of prosecution of youth as adults**

Focus groups indicate that the public supports prosecution of youth in adult criminal court as a way of assuring that youth are held accountable for their actions. But the public has little awareness of the consequences of prosecution in adult court. In a number of states, youth prosecuted as adults are held in adult jails before trial, and are sent to adult prisons if convicted. Research has documented the increased risk to youth in adult facilities of suicide, physical and sexual assault, and assault with a weapon.

It is important for advocates to present this information to the public. The public understands the dangers to young people in adult jails and prisons, and feels strongly that young people should not be locked up with adult inmates. Advocates should thus combine several types of information: (1) the dangerous consequences of prosecution in adult court in their particular state, (2) personal stories of young people who have been victims of abuse in adult jails and prisons, and (3) effective ways of providing accountability for youth *in juvenile court.*

In addition, advocates can point out examples of young people who committed offenses, stayed in juvenile court and were not prosecuted as adults, and have achieved significant success in their lives. The best source for such examples is *Second Chances: Giving Kids a Chance to Make a Better Choice*, prepared by the Children's Court Centennial Communications Project, and available at the Center for Juvenile and Criminal Justice website, www.cjcj.org (Publications – July, 1999). The examples include individuals who got into trouble when they were young but went on to become prominent public officials, judges, professional athletes, Olympic champions, even a U.S. Senator. (For examples, see the sample materials section for opinion editorials from former youth offenders Brandon Maxwell, Bob Beamon, Terence Hallinan and Jeremy Estrada).

- **Avoid the "youth excuse"**

The *Building Blocks* survey found that the public is less persuaded by arguments that young offenders have been abused or neglected, that they are too young to be responsible for their crimes, or that young people often make mistakes. Advocates are more likely to be effective with messages about the importance of rehabilitation and the potential of young people to change.

- **Don't rely on statistics alone**

Statistics such as the fact that 94% of all juvenile arrests each year are for non-violent offenses appear dramatic, but they are not persuasive in themselves. This is true for several reasons. First, the public is skeptical in general about the use of statistics to make an argument, and often questions the source of the data. Second, even if the public accepts the statistics, it is still very concerned about the violent crimes that young people do commit. Third, fear of violent crime is a powerful emotion, and the numbers do not override that emotional response.

This does not mean that advocates should avoid statistics altogether. Advocates should use data such as those on the relatively small percentage of juvenile arrests for violent crimes, and on the significant racial disparities in how White youth and youth of color are treated in the system for the same offense, but they should use the data in conjunction with acknowledgment of the need for accountability, with solid information about effective programs as alternatives to incarceration and the dangers of prosecution as adults, and personal stories to illustrate the messages.

- **Use these key words and concepts when communicating your message to the public:**

The public opinion research indicates that these words and concepts resonate well with the public:

- Rehabilitation
- Counseling
- Potential to change
- Victims' rights
- Consequences
- Community service
- Mentoring
- Prevent youth from being housed with adults
- Youth do not belong in prison

- **Avoid these key words and concepts when communicating your message to the public:**

These words and concepts do not resonate well with the public:

- Statistics to show incidence of non-violent or first-time offenders
- "Youth excuses" such as:
- Abuse early in life
- Youthful mistakes
- Immaturity

The public does not clearly understand these key words and concepts:

- Prosecute as adults
- Group homes
- Juvenile facilities
- Non-violent
- Juvenile justice system

- **Avoid using the term "juvenile"**

In the *Building Blocks* poll, the terms "youth" and "young people" elicited strongly positive reactions and little in the way of negatives. "Teenagers" also brought much more positive reaction than negative (although the FrameWorks poll found strongly negative associations to the word). In the *Building Blocks* poll, public reaction to "kids" was about equally positive or neutral, with somewhat less negative reaction. But the term "juvenile" was strongly negative: three times as many people saw it as negative as saw it positive. From the focus groups it was evident that the term "juvenile" is associated with "juvenile delinquent," and therefore carries a very negative image

KEY MESSENGERS

Based on the *Building Blocks* poll and earlier polls, certain "key" messengers should be utilized when conveying juvenile justice reform messages to the public:

- **Put a face on the problem through personal stories of incarcerated youth**

As noted earlier, one of the best ways to illustrate abuses in the juvenile justice system is to put faces on the issues. It is important to tell personal stories. Advocates should work with young people who have been in the system to convey the dangers of overcrowded, ill-equipped juvenile facilities, as well as the perils of jailing young people with adult inmates. (For an example, see the sample materials section for the *Building Blocks* fact sheet, "Dangers of Incarcerating Youth With Adults.")
The *Building Blocks* survey indicates that many people would be moved by such stories to promote juvenile justice reform. These stories can be extremely powerful. When Congress in recent years has

considered federal legislation to amend the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act to allow more jailing of children with adult inmates, one of the most potent strategies by advocates has been to present personal stories of abuse by young people and accounts of suicides by grieving parents. (For an example, see the sample materials section for the Youth Law Center press release with quotes from Janice Peterman, a parent of a youth who committed suicide in an adult jail).

The public is also very receptive to stories about young people who have turned their lives around – local examples of the *Second Chances* stories mentioned earlier in this guide. (For examples, see the sample materials section for opinion editorials from former youth offenders Brandon Maxwell, Bob Beamon, Terence Hallinan and Jeremy Estrada).

- **Use appropriate messengers such as rehabilitated juvenile offenders and their parents and victims of crime**

The *Building Blocks* survey demonstrates that the public is most receptive to messages presented by those who have been directly involved in the system: rehabilitated juvenile offenders and their parents, and victims of crime. The public also gives significant credibility to the police and judges. The public is much less likely to be persuaded by the U.S. Department of Justice, prosecutors, television news, or newspapers. Elected officials are the *least* credible with the public for information on juvenile crime, even less credible than the ACLU. (For examples, see the sample materials section for opinion editorials from former youth offenders Brandon Maxwell, Bob Beamon, Terence Hallinan and Jeremy Estrada).

Advocates should be aware of these differences, and plan their presentations accordingly: a young person or parent who tells their story in the system, or a crime victim who wants to reduce crime by promoting effective juvenile justice reforms, may be much more effective than a politician who has high name-recognition.

- **Recruit unusual allies such as police, prosecutors and victims organizations**

Some advocates for young people in the juvenile justice system have been reticent about developing alliances with the police, prosecutors, and victims organizations. They have assumed that they have no common ground with such "pro-prosecution" groups.

Advocates should understand that all segments in the community have a strong interest in developing an effective juvenile justice system that has broad public support. An effective juvenile justice system makes the community safer by enabling youth in trouble to turn their lives around, without exposing them unnecessarily to the corrupting influence of violent offenders or adult inmates. Many police, prosecutors, and victims organizations recognize this, and support effective juvenile justice reforms. Thus, advocates for young people should seek out allies in law enforcement and victims organizations to cooperate on reform efforts.

MESSAGING

- **Communicate clear and straightforward messages**

Advocates should develop an over-arching message which has the following elements:

(1) The message states the problem in terms of a system that is running contrary to our values (e.g., fairness);

(2) The message states the solution in terms that are consistent with our values and describe practical steps to bringing about reform.

- **Here are some examples:**

(1) Society is giving up on young lives and we are all paying a high price. Locking up young people in trouble in dirty, dangerous, overcrowded facilities, and with adult criminals, is costly and counter-productive. It creates criminals of the future.

(2) We must rehabilitate young people in trouble. Most youth have the potential to change, and it is less costly and more effective to turn their lives around through rehabilitation programs than to continue to arrest them and lock them up.

(3) Rehabilitation should include programs that teach young people that there are consequences for their actions. Young people who commit crimes should be held accountable to their victims and to the community in ways that are effective – simply locking them up is not effective.
(4) America's juvenile justice system must be fair and effective. But right now, young people of color are treated more harshly than white youth for the same crimes. Too often, the system unfairly dooms minority youth to abusive confinement and no opportunity for rehabilitation.

(5) We must correct this injustice with measures to address the unequal treatment of young people of color, measures such as new guidelines for arrest, detention, prosecution, and sentencing that reduce racial bias and overcome racial stereotypes.

- **Use these messages proactively and look for opportunities to communicate your juvenile justice reform message to the public through the media**

Don't wait until the next school shooting to 'respond' with these messages, create your own media event and communicate your pro-active message to the public. Use the sample talking points on juvenile justice reform issues included as a guide the next time you prepare to speak at a public event, meet with your local newspaper's editorial board, give testimony at a hearing with state legislators, or at your next statewide Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention State Advisory Group meeting.

For suggestions on these potential opportunities, see the sample materials section for the document, "A Sample of Juvenile Justice Calendar Events: Annual Events that You Can Use to Publicize Juvenile Justice Issues, Every Year."

For general guidelines on working with the media, see the Media Guide for Youth Advocates, published by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), and available on the

OJJDP website at: http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/jcci/mediakit.html.

- **Train the 'messengers' to utilize the key messages in this guide**

For example, you can use the 'power point' presentation that accompanies this guide to present the public opinion findings to youth, juvenile justice colleagues, parents groups, and unusual allies.

CASE EXAMPLES

THE MARYLAND CAMPAIGN TO CLOSE CHELTENHAM

Background

Opened in 1872 as the House of Reformation for Colored Boys, the Cheltenham youth detention center is a towering symbol of racial injustice in the state of Maryland. Although 17% of Maryland's youth population are black-males and black males make up 39% of youth arrests in Maryland, fully 81% of the youth in Cheltenham are African American boys. Over the years, Cheltenham had a series of scandals and abuses that generated coverage in the local newspapers. At one point, the facility was so over crowded that it held over 300 youth although it had a 167 bed capacity. Cottages that were designed to hold 24 youth were stuffed with 100 youth, with only 3 or 4 staff members supervising the cottages.

A fire safety inspector repeatedly recommended that Cheltenham be closed, and issued a report recommending its closure. Because the building is so old, all of the cells have to be opened individually by keys. In one fire inspection report, the fire inspector indicated that the Cheltenham facility staff couldn't find the keys to many of the youths' cells. The facility had numerous "dead end" corridors that could become literal dead ends in the event of a fire.

In addition to fire and health safety problems, a staff member at Cheltenham stabbed a youth on New Year's Day in 2001. Several months earlier, a boy was repeatedly raped at Cheltenham. Children were routinely brutalized and beaten by other youth and staff. One worker reported that suicide watch kids were placed in isolation because there was not enough staff to supervise them.

Advocates Take Action

After the Secretary of Maryland's Department of Juvenile Justice publicly stated that the facility should be razed because of its deplorable conditions, the Maryland Juvenile Justice coalition took a number of steps to push for Cheltenham's permanent closure. The coalition formed the Maryland Campaign to Close Cheltenham, involving parents of incarcerated youth, youth, activists, and faith leaders from all over the state. With support of the Building Blocks for Youth initiative, the coalition devised and delivered key messages to the public through a media advocacy campaign, mobilized individuals and organizations all over the state to attend several highly publicized events, and reached out to thousands of concerned citizens through an e-activist approach utilizing a new campaign website to get basic campaign information, facts, press materials, and

take action steps such as signing up to join the campaign and receive campaign updates via email, sending email letters to key decision makers and signing an on-line petition.

Delivering the Message

Advocates utilized key messages based on what the public supports such as incarceration is an ineffective approach to reducing youth violence, rehabilitation over incarceration, and racial fairness. The messages also focused on abusive conditions at the facility and realistic solutions to closing the facility and proposed alternatives to incarceration.

To deliver these messages, advocates organized three major events involving key messengers, such as parents of incarcerated youth, youth, and faith leaders.

First, advocates organized a press conference call calling for the closure of the facility and launching a campaign website and issued a press statement. "Cheltenham is no place for kids. My son needed help, but Cheltenham provided no drug or rehabilitative programs. Instead, he was beaten and neglected. It's dangerous, it doesn't work and it should be shut down," says Linda Conway, a spokesperson for the campaign on the press conference call and a mother from Prince George's County whose son was beaten during his four months at Cheltenham for a non-violent offense. (For the full statement, see Appendix or visit: http://www.closecheltenham.org/022201_pressrelease.html)

Second, faith leaders from all over the state called on their congregations to 'get on the bus' to meet with key decision makers to push them to take steps during a critical time period when the legislature makes final decisions about the state's budget. A spokesperson for the campaign, Reverend Gregory Perkins, President of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance stated, "Cheltenham is one of the last symbols of Maryland's segregationist Jim Crow policies, and is a painful reminder of continuing inequality for minority children in the juvenile justice system. Enough is enough. We need to shut down the facility, and bring our children home to programs that work." (For the full statement, see Appendix or visit: http://www.closecheltenham.org/030101_pressrelease.html)

Finally, advocates held a rally and testified at the legislature during the budget hearing on the Department of Juvenile Justice's budget. A spokesperson for the campaign, Jim McComb, President of the Maryland Juvenile Justice Coalition stated, "Maryland legislators have an historic opportunity to close down the dangerous Cheltenham facility, and implement sound policies that help our kids turn their lives around, and more effectively build and protect our communities." (For the full statement, see Appendix or visit: http://www.closecheltenham.org/030501_pressrelease.html)

The Results

The ultimate outcome of the campaign was legislation enacted by the legislature through the annual budget process to phase down and eventually close the

facility, and significant increases in funding for alternative community-based programs for youth. Through this public campaign, the Maryland press covered the story and reported on the major events organized by the activists. For the full press coverage, see the Appendex or visit: http://www.closecheltenham.org/newsdesk.html. Thousands of Maryland citizens contacted key decision makers by sending letters, calling, and signing the on-line petition.

Lessons Learned

Seize political opportunities:
Cheltenham's disgraceful history as a segregated correctional center combined with recent scandals and abuse made it an easy target for media and advocacy efforts. Advocates had always painted the facility as a dangerous and inappropriate place for children, and had recommended its closure. The seed advocates had planted began to grow when a number of conditions combined to create a political opportunity ripe for closure — the Juvenile Justice Secretary publicly stated that the facility should be demolished, a report by the fire department recommended its closure due to hazardous conditions, and one youth was raped and another stabbed while in detention. Youth advocates immediately seized the opportunity, and began to mobilize a public campaign.

Many Messengers, One Message:
One of the greatest strengths of the campaign was its diversity and breadth. Juvenile justice advocates were joined by ministers, civil rights organizations, youth groups, prison activists, social service providers, parents of incarcerated youth and national experts all calling for the closure of the facility. The campaign appealed to communities who most care about the issue of juvenile justice, and mobilized them in a cohesive, powerful and effective campaign of diverse citizens who effectively communicated the need to shut down the facility.

Successful Advocacy Requires Effective Media Strategy:
During the course of the campaign, the legislative and advocacy strategy was intimately tied to the media work. Local media outlets in the districts of individual legislators and decision makers were high priority targets. Reporters at influential news outlets were pitched, opinion pieces were placed, letters to the editors were written, editorials were solicited, and spokespeople were placed on radio shows.

In addition to attempting to move key decision makers, the media effort also dovetailed outreach and mobilization efforts. Media outlets that most directly reached natural constituents were targeted with strategic messages. For example, the Afro, an African American newspaper in Baltimore (where most of the youth in Cheltenham came from), ran stories, op eds, and editorialized about the campaign. Many of these papers even explained how readers could become involved in the campaign by directing them to call the legislature and take action through the campaign's website.

Target Your Message: Different Audiences, Different Messages:
In the media advocacy efforts focused on the Baltimore community papers and African American outlets, the message highlighted disproportionate minority

confinement and the historical racial injustices at Cheltenham.

In Montgomery County, where the population is largely, white, upper middle class, and somewhat progressive, the media advocacy messages emphasized that Cheltenham is no place for children by highlighting the fire hazards and physical/sexual abuses occurring there.

Highlight Personal Stories:
The advocates provided reporters with individual stories that would put a human face to the issues we were talking about. A mother of a son who was incarcerated in the facility described a day she went to visit her son when he was covered in bruises and cuts from a beating he received while guards stood by and watched. A teacher who used to instruct youth in the facility described the severe lack of resources such as books that made teaching near impossible. An intake officer talked about the ways in which sick children with health issues were held in the infirmary with violent offenders. All of these stories were told to reporters.

The advocates also negotiated a dramatic and powerful "exclusive" with the Washington Post to guarantee coverage. Youth advocates and the media team worked with the family of the youth who had been brutally raped in the facility to help them share their story with the press. The child's anonymity was protected, and the family was accompanied during all interviews. The result was a prominent story in a widely-read and well-respected paper that otherwise might not have covered the campaign.

Build and Maintain Momentum:
Advocates carefully planned their media strategy, emphasizing building momentum in the efforts. For example, advocates first organized an initial telephone press conference call to announce the campaign and the launch the website, www.closecheltehnham.org. The press conference phone call featured a parent, an expert, a teacher and former staff person, an intake officer, and a state legislator who all called for the facility's closure. The press covered the event, featuring the formation of the coalition, and all mentioned the website (which greatly helped outreach and organizing efforts.)

The following week, advocates held a press conference to announce the endorsement of an alliance of over 200 Baltimore ministers. The Associated Press, state and local dailies, alternative weeklies, and all the local TV stations attended and covered the conference. The endorsement of the ministers broadened the base of the coalition, and demonstrated growing support for the effort to close down the facility.

Finally, advocates encouraged press to attend a budget hearing where coalition members testified about the need to close Cheltenham. Outside of the hearings, a group of youth and prison activists created a great photo opportunity as they kept vigil over the hearings with colorful signs and puppets. All of the major media events suggested a building campaign to close the facility.

Use All Available Media:
The media outreach for the campaign targeted the broad spectrum of media

outlets available. Advocates established a website with up-to-date information, new coverage and press releases to keep all reporters easily informed. Larger state daily papers were targeted, as well as smaller but important community and African American papers. News radio shows ran stories, and ministers spoke about the campaign on religious radio stations. Evening news programs ran television stories about the campaign, as did local cable access channels. A few, carefully selected advertisements were run in less expensive, targeted newspapers, urging readers to call their legislators and demand the facility's closure. In short, all available media was used for a total market saturation of the Close Cheltenham campaign.

THE LOUISIANA CAMPAIGN TO CLOSE TALLULAH

Background

Opened in 1995, the Tallulah Correctional Center for youth has been a national scandal for the human rights violations of children incarcerated there, earning the distinction as "the worst in the nation" with the *New York Times*. The facility was the business venture of three private businessmen with no experience running a prison. In the first three years of its existence, Tallulah youth participated in four major rebellions, demanding basic supplies such as adequate food and protections from abuse. In 1999, things were so unsafe for the youth, and the guards, that staff actually walked off of their posts and left more than 400 incarcerated boys unsupervised. Representatives from he department of corrections were flown in by helicopter to handle the situation.

In 1998 the Justice Department sued the state of Louisiana for violating the civil rights of youth held in state custody, marking the first time the federal government actively sued a state over the conditions of its juvenile facilities. As part of the settlement, the state took over the facility and promised more money to clean up the conditions.

But two years later, Boys with shattered jaws and broken noses routinely appear in Tallulah's infirmary. The facility has no competent psychologist to treat the 450 youth with behavioral disorders, depression and histories of childhood abuse and trauma. And even though the state has run the facility since 1995, the private owners still managed to make $9 million off of the misery of youth. A local state senator has called for the closure of the facility.

Advocates Take Action

To end the horrendous abuses in the Tallulah facility, the Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana joined the Federal Department of Justice in a lawsuit against the state of Louisiana for human right violations in the juvenile facility. Out of the lawsuit came a prominent national investigative story in the *New York Times*, which referred to Tallulah as the nation's worst juvenile prison and detailed the specific abuses children suffered in the facility. Youth advocates launched a project to change Louisiana's juvenile justice policy on the state level from one that relies almost exclusively on incarceration to a system that focuses on

community based alternatives to incarceration. JJPL helped to coordinate parents of Louisiana's incarcerated children to help them better advocate for their individual children as well as effectively push for broader reforms in the juvenile justice system. The parents group took shape, the Parents and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children, and organized creative and high-energy media event organized by the parents to call for the closure of the Tallulah facility and more rehabilitative programs for Louisiana's youth.

Delivering the Message

From the early stages of advocacy and reform, advocates and parents utilized publicly palatable key message to call to for the closure of the facility, and for more investment in community based programs. The messages emphasized that children are brutalized in the facility, and that they do not receive the rehabilitation, medical or mental health treatment that they need. The messages also indicated that better options exist to hold children accountable and help them turn lives around.

To deliver the message, advocates emphasized the deplorable conditions of the facility and the better options that exist to treat children in all of their work with the media.

The parents group generated news by using holidays as media hooks and creative events. On Father's Day, one father wrote a moving opinion article about how he was unable to visit his son who was incarcerated in Tallulah for drug abuse. He vividly described his families suffering and that palpable fear in his son's voice who was afraid of being beaten. The op ed delivered the key message that young people should be responsible for their action, but also no child should be brutalized: "While young people should be held accountable for their actions, I do not believe that a child should be punished with physical and emotional abuse."

The parents also organized a "Jazz Funeral" to symbolize the dying dreams and opportunities for Louisiana's Children, and to call for "Tallulah RIP." Over 60 families, youth, citizens and supporters marched down the streets of New Orleans behind a horse drawn carriage carrying a coffin, and bearing signs calling for the closure of Tallulah. The very name and nature of the media event dramatically communicated the key message that children hopes and dreams for a better future were dying in Louisiana's facilities.

In all of the interviews with the media on the jazz funeral, media spokespeople emphasized the message that children deserve a second chance, and that Louisiana facilities destroy dreams instead of rehabilitate children: Avis Brock, a parent organizer, told the New Orleans *Times Picayune*: "Before we lock our kids up, we need to be able to look ourselves in the mirror and say we've done all we can for this child." The funeral procession was followed by moving presentations from key messengers such as parents and formally incarcerated youth, who shared their personal stories of children's abuse and neglect and called for the closure of Tallulah. The personal stories of the parents and youth communicated the need to close the facility in a powerful and more compelling way than data ever could.

Also, all of the materials and interviews consistently referred to incarcerated young people as "youth," or "children" instead of "juveniles." One mother described how her son had his jaw broken in the facility, and how even she was afraid to visit: "[Tallulah] is nowhere you want to go....I hated to go there. I wanted to see my child, but I didn't want to go there."

The event was covered by all four local television stations, who interviewed the key messengers: a parent, a rehabilitated youth offender, a local judge, and a politician. Senator Donald Cravins, Chair of the Judiciary B committee which oversees corrections, called for closing Tallulah, and point to a sensible and realizable alternatives. Cravins' op-ed referenced another Louisiana juvenile facility that had successfully been closed: "By working closely with corrections officials, police, prosecutors and the community, the Jena youth prison was safely closed in only six weeks, and the youth were moved into rigorously monitored community-and-family-based programs or other facilities...We should spend the next 12 months planning to replicate the Jena success story and to support, empower and prepare a cluster of local treatment programs to give the state's troubled youth a chance to turn their lives around." Parents placed flowers on the coffin to symbolize the dying dreams of incarcerated children, and the jazz funeral ended on a celebratory note as everybody danced for justice and waved "Tallulah RIP" handkerchiefs in the air. The celebration at the end communicated hope for children's future. The jazz funeral received major media attention before and after the event, and all of the coverage reflected the core messages of the jazz funeral. The Monday following the event, the Times Picayune editorialized in favor of closing down Tallulah: "Violence within prisons in no way contributes to the rehabilitation of young offenders, which is supposed to be the primary goals of the juvenile justice system...If the state can't figure out how to run the prison in a manner that is humane to inmates and their families, it ought to shut Tallulah down."

The Results

The work of the advocates to has planted the seeds for the future reform of Louisiana's juvenile justice policy. With the help of JJPL, Senator Cravins successfully authored a joint resolution calling for the creation of a study commission to conduct an assessment of the Louisiana juvenile justice system. The advocates' work with the parents has built up local and community leaders to stage major events, speak effectively to the public and the media, and to tie message to strategic reforms. As a result of the consistent messaging on the need for more rehabilitative programs in the state and the call to close Tallulah, the media has shifted to editorialize in favor of closing the facility.



Close Cheltenham NOW!

a citizens' campaign to close Maryland's worst youth prison

PRESS RELEASE FEBRUARY 22, 2001

Contact: Laura Jones, 202-737-7270, x254 or Cell: 202-425-4659
Or Sharon Rubinstein, 410-547-9200, x3024

Maryland Coalition Launches Campaign and New Website to Close Cheltenham Youth Facility

Calls on Legislators to Commit to One Year Phase Out Plan to Move Youth to Treatment Programs and New Facilities

Annapolis, MD—A diverse coalition of parents, children's advocates, juvenile justice organizations, youth activists and citizens today announced a campaign to shut down Cheltenham Youth Detention Center, "Maryland's Worst Youth Prison." The coalition's new website argues that the 129-year old institution is beyond repair, and that the youth should be moved from Cheltenham into community-based rehabilitation programs and newer facilities. The coalition will host a variety of events culminating in a rally at the Cheltenham facility and a lobby day in Annapolis on March 5th.

Grievances listed on **www.closecheltenham.org** include: lack of adequate mental health services and treatment programs; grossly inadequate education services; dangers due to inadequate fire safety equipment; staff neglect and incompetence resulting in abuse and rape; failure to rehabilitate youth, nearly 90% of whom are at the facility for non-violent offenses; and the disproportionate confinement of minority youth.

Linda Conway, a mother from Prince George's County whose son was beaten during his four months at Cheltenham for a non-violent offense, said: "Cheltenham is no place for kids. My son needed help, but Cheltenham provided no drug or rehabilitative programs. Instead, he was beaten and neglected. It's dangerous, it doesn't work and it should be shut down."

Opened in 1872 as the House of Reformation for Colored Boys, Cheltenham has a long history of scandal. One boy was stabbed on New Year's Day 2001 by a staff member, and another boy was repeatedly raped in different rooms of the facility within the last year. A recent fire safety report recommended that the building be closed, and Juvenile Justice Secretary Bishop Robinson said that it should be demolished.

Montgomery County Delegate Sharon Grosfeld said, "Cheltenham should have been closed a long time ago. Cheltenham is a disaster, not only for the facility but most especially for the boys in that facility. I am a mother, and we don't want to treat any child the way Cheltenham treats the children in its facility."

The coalition has called on Maryland legislators to commit to a gradual one-year phase out plan, which would reallocate resources from Cheltenham into community-based programs. Cheltenham youth would be placed in treatment programs, or moved into a new 144-bed facility opening in Baltimore in 2002. In 1986, Maryland successfully closed the Montrose Training School in only eight months. While the Department of Juvenile Justice reports 80% rearrest rates for youth coming out of their locked institutions, only 20% of the youth diverted from Montrose into community programs were rearrested.

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Close Cheltenham NOW!

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PRESS RELEASE MARCH 1, 2001

Contact: Laura Jones, 202-737-7270, x254 or Cell: 202-425-4659
Or Sharon Rubinstein, 410-547-9200, x3024

More Than 200 Pastors Endorse the Campaign to Close Cheltenham

Call on Congregants, Families of Youth in Cheltenham to "Get On the Bus" to Rally the Facility, Lobby in Annapolis on March 5th

Baltimore, MD—The citizens campaign to close the Cheltenham youth facility picked up powerful allies today with the endorsement of more than 200 pastors during the monthly meeting of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance of Baltimore and Vicinity (IMA), an inter- denominational, inter-faith and inter-racial alliance. The ministers announced their efforts to turn out congregants and families of youth in Cheltenham to "Get on the Bus" to rally at the facility and lobby in Annapolis on March 5th. Juvenile justice sectary Bishop Robison spoke at the press conference, and supported the closure of Cheltenham.

Among others, the ministers cited their primary grievances as the disproportionate confinement of youth of color in Cheltenham, and the facility's remote location from Baltimore families, whose children make up about one half of Cheltenham's population.

Although African American males make up only 17% of Maryland's youth population and 39% of youth arrests, they make up 81% of the youth confined Cheltenham. Cheltenham was opened in 1872 as the House of Reformation for Colored Boys. Cheltenham is over 50 miles from Baltimore. Its inaccessibility to families and clergy is a serious barrier to the type of healing and reconciliation that the ministers consider key to the youths' rehabilitation.

"Cheltenham is one of the last symbols of Maryland's segregationist Jim Crow policies, and is a painful reminder of continuing inequality for minority children in the juvenile justice system," said Reverend Gregory Perkins, President of the IMA. "Enough is enough. We need to shut down the facility, and bring our children home to programs that work."

The coalition lists its primary concerns as: abuse and neglect of the youth confined in the facility; lack of adequate mental health services and treatment programs; grossly inadequate education services; dangers due to inadequate fire safety equipment; staff neglect and incompetence; and failure to rehabilitate youth, nearly 90% of whom are at the facility for non-violent offenses.

The coalition has called on Maryland legislators to commit to a gradual one-year phase out plan, which would reallocate resources from Cheltenham into community-based programs. Cheltenham youth would be placed in treatment programs, or moved into a new 144-bed facility opening in Baltimore in 2002. A small number would remain at one remaining cottage, while the rest would be replaced with a modern, 24-bed facility.

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For more information about the campaign to close Cheltenham, visit **www.closecheltenham.org,** or contact: **Laura Jones,** 202-737-7270, 254 or cell: 202-425-4659; or **Sharon Rubinstein,** 410-547-9200, x3024.



Close Cheltenham NOW!

a citizens' campaign to close Maryland's worst youth prison

PRESS RELEASE MARCH 5, 2001

Contact: Laura Jones, 202-737-7270, x254 or Cell: 202-425-4659
Or Sharon Rubinstein, 410-547-9200, x3024

Clergy, Students, Parents and Citizens Lobby Legislators to Close Cheltenham

Annapolis, MD—The citizens' campaign to close the Cheltenham youth facility held a high energy and spirited lobby day today during the House Budget Hearing on the Department of Juvenile Justice's Budget. Bearing puppets, signs and other creative props, the group of ministers, students, parents, and concerned citizens called on Maryland legislators to commit to a one-year phase out program to close Cheltenham.

The coalition asked the budget committee to shift funding out of the Cheltenham facility, and instead invest in community and family based rehabilitative and treatment programs. The coalition also called on the Governor and Lt. Governor to assure that all funds saved from the closure of Cheltenham be earmarked in the Department of Juvenile Justice budget to fund rigorous and effective alternatives to detention.

"Maryland legislators have an historic opportunity to close down the dangerous Cheltenham facility, and implement sound policies that help our kids turn their lives around, and more effectively build and protect our communities," said Jim McComb, President of the Maryland Juvenile Justice Coalition.

The coalition's phase out plan is modeled after the 1986 closure of the Montrose Training School, which was shut down in only 8 months. While the Department of Juvenile Justice reports 80% rearrest rates for youth coming out of their locked institutions, only 20% of the youth diverted from Montrose into community programs were rearrested. Cheltenham youth could be placed in treatment programs, or moved into a new 144-bed facility opening in Baltimore in 2002. The coalition is recommending that one 24-bed facility remain open for Prince Georges' County and southern Maryland youth.

Reverend Gregory Perkins, president of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, said, "Cheltenham is a sad testimony to our society's continuing racial disparities. Like all systems of injustice, Cheltenham should be closed."

Although African American males make up only 17% of Maryland's youth population and 39% of youth arrests, they make up 81% of the youth confined Cheltenham. Cheltenham was opened in 1872 as the House of Reformation for Colored Boys, and is one of the state's remaining symbols of the "Jim Crow" segregationist era. Cheltenham is over 50 miles from Baltimore where most of the youth come from.

The coalition lists its primary concerns as: abuse and neglect of the youth confined in the facility; the disparate confinement of minority youth; lack of adequate mental health services and treatment programs; grossly inadequate education services; dangers due to inadequate fire safety equipment; staff neglect and incompetence; and failure to rehabilitate youth, nearly 90% of whom are at the facility for non-violent offenses.

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For more information about the campaign to close Cheltenham, visit **www.closecheltenham.org,** or contact: ***Laura Jones,*** *202-737-7270, 254 or cell: 202-425-4659; or* ***Sharon Rubinstein,*** *410-547-9200, x3024.*

Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Youth
822 Camp Street
New Orleans, Louisiana 70130
(504) 522-5437

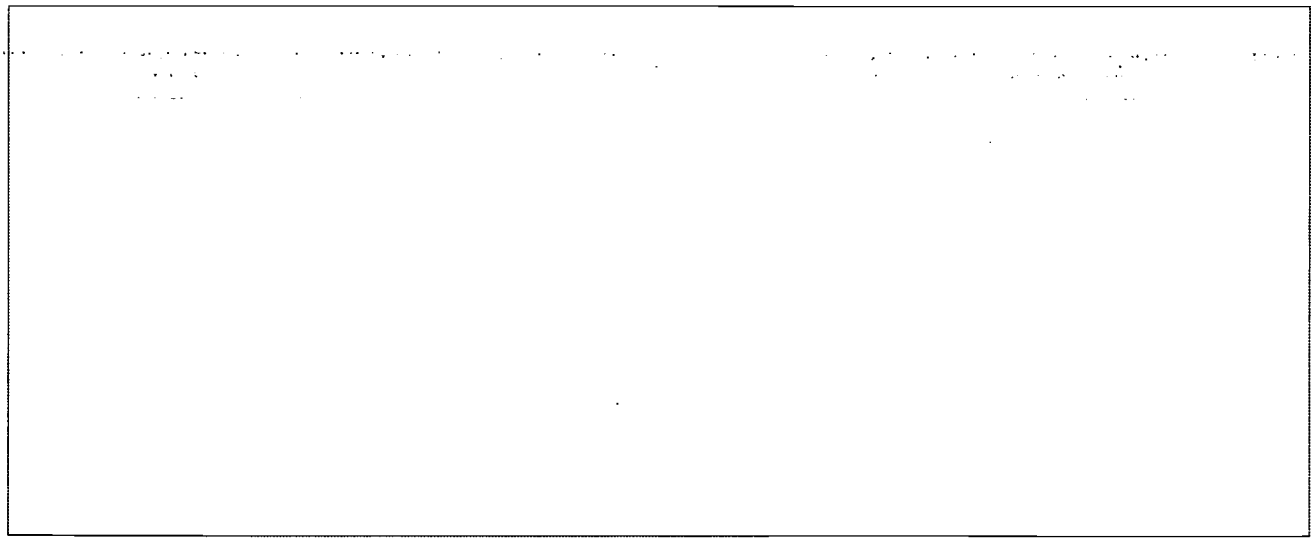
MEDIA ADVISORY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 28, 2001

Contact: Gina Womack, (504) 522-5437
Avis Brock, (504) 527-0063

Parents Hold Jazz Funeral to Mourn the Departed Dreams of Louisiana's Incarcerated Youth

TALLULAH RIP! Rally for the Closure of Tallulah Youth Facility, Call for Alternatives To Incarceration



Families of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children is an advocacy and support group of parents and concerned citizens calling for less incarceration of Louisiana's youth, the closure of the Tallulah facility, and more investment in rehabilitation and less incarceration.

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Close Tallulah Now!
A People's Campaign to Close Louisiana's Worst Youth Prison

Kids lives are at stake. *Tallulah is a dangerous and violent facility where children are more likely to be neglected, beaten or raped than receive the education and treatment they need. Tallulah's children are routinely brought to the hospital for broken jaws, smashed teeth, and major cuts and bruises.*

$25 Million down the drain. *Hard-earned taxpayers' money is wasted on a facility that profits businessmen, and does not rehabilitate kids or protect our communities. These kids would be better treated in community and family based programs that have been proven to rehabilitate youth.*

Better options exist. *60% of the youth detained in Tallulah are non-violent offenders. Housing them in an ill-equipped dangerous facility like Tallulah is criminal. Community-based treatment programs for non-violent youth can provide higher quality educational services, reduce recidivism rates and cut costs. Kids need treatment and training—not bruises and abuse—to help them turn their lives around.*

Tallulah has never worked, and it never will. *Built in 1995 as one of the largest youth prisons in the country, Tallulah has now earned the distinction as one of our nation's worst facilities. Things were so bad that the federal government stepped in to sue the state. For the last two years, Tallulah has been under federal watch but little has improved for the kids that continue to get beaten and abused.*

We've closed youth jails before, and we should do it again with Tallulah. In 2000, Jena was safely closed in only 6 weeks. Tallulah should be closed in the next 12 months by moving the kids into rigorously monitored community and family based programs, or other facilities. We cannot risk another kids' safety to delay—we need a plan to close Tallulah now, and move our kids into programs that work.

Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children *is an advocacy and support group calling for less incarceration of Louisiana's youth, and more investment in community-based treatment and rehabilitation programs.*

Key Dates in Juvenile Justice
Calendar of Events

Annual Events that You Can Use To Publicize Juvenile Justice Issues, Every Year

September

Labor Day

- "Jobs Not Jails" for Our Youth. Student Employment Programs versus Zero Tolerance Policies.

Back to School

- "Schools not Jails" or "Books Not Bars" campaign against increased investment in jails while decreased spending on education
- Treatment and Education, not Incarceration campaign to show that education and treatment programs more effective and less costly than incarceration
- School shooting statistics (e.g. CJCJ School House Hype study)

October

Columbus Day

- Highlight disparate confinement of First Nations/Native American youth

Halloween

- Ghost, goblins and goules aren't as scary as a life without second chances for kids in adult jails

November

Annual Release of DOJ National Juvenile Crime Data

Thanksgiving

- Publicize non-violent kids who can't be with their families because they are incarcerated.
- Thankful op-ed from a kid who went through the juvenile system talking about the lost opportunities for youth tried as adults.

December

Christmas

- Publicize non-violent kids who can't be with their families because they are in adult jails.

January

State Political Events

- Legislative Calendar

Follow bills, budgets, etc

- State of the State Address
- Swearing in of New Governors

Martin Luther King Day

- Racial Disparities in the Juvenile Justice System

February

President's Day

- Point out presidential programs/policies negatively impacting kids in the adult or juvenile systems (e.g. enforcement of barring student loans to youth with drug felony convictions).

Black History Month

- Racial Disparities in the Juvenile Justice System
- Success stories (Juvenile System vs. Adult System)

March

International Women's Day

- Girls in the juvenile justice system

April

Columbine Anniversary

- Reminder that youth violence and crime are on the decline, and schools are among the safest place to be for our youth.

Easter

- Have a minister sermonize on juvenile justice issues

May

Mothers Day

- Publicize non-violent youth who can't be with their mothers because they are incarcerated
- Publicize number of mothers who can't be with their kids because the youth are in detention centers of adult jails.

Graduation Time

- Kids in the adult system are "graduating" to a life without second chances

June

Beginning of Summer

- Events tied to prevention programs

Studies show that crime goes up in the summer when kids don't have meaningful activities

Father's Day

- Publicize non-violent youth who can't be with their fathers because they are incarcerated

July

Independence Day

- As Americans fire up their grills to celebrate our nation's independence, 2,000 kids locked in detention centers or adult jails have nothing to celebrate.

Other Possible Hooks

These are events you could do anytime of the year, depending on your state's calendar, your goals, and your capacity to do these events.

Annual Release of Kids Count data (e.g. pull out jj portion and release separately)

High Notoriety State and National Crimes

- e.g., youth who killed, resulting in a bad state law

Anniversary of Passage of Major Laws

- e.g., anniversary of California Prop. 21; passage of SB 179 in Ohio one year later

Hundred year anniversary of your state's juvenile court

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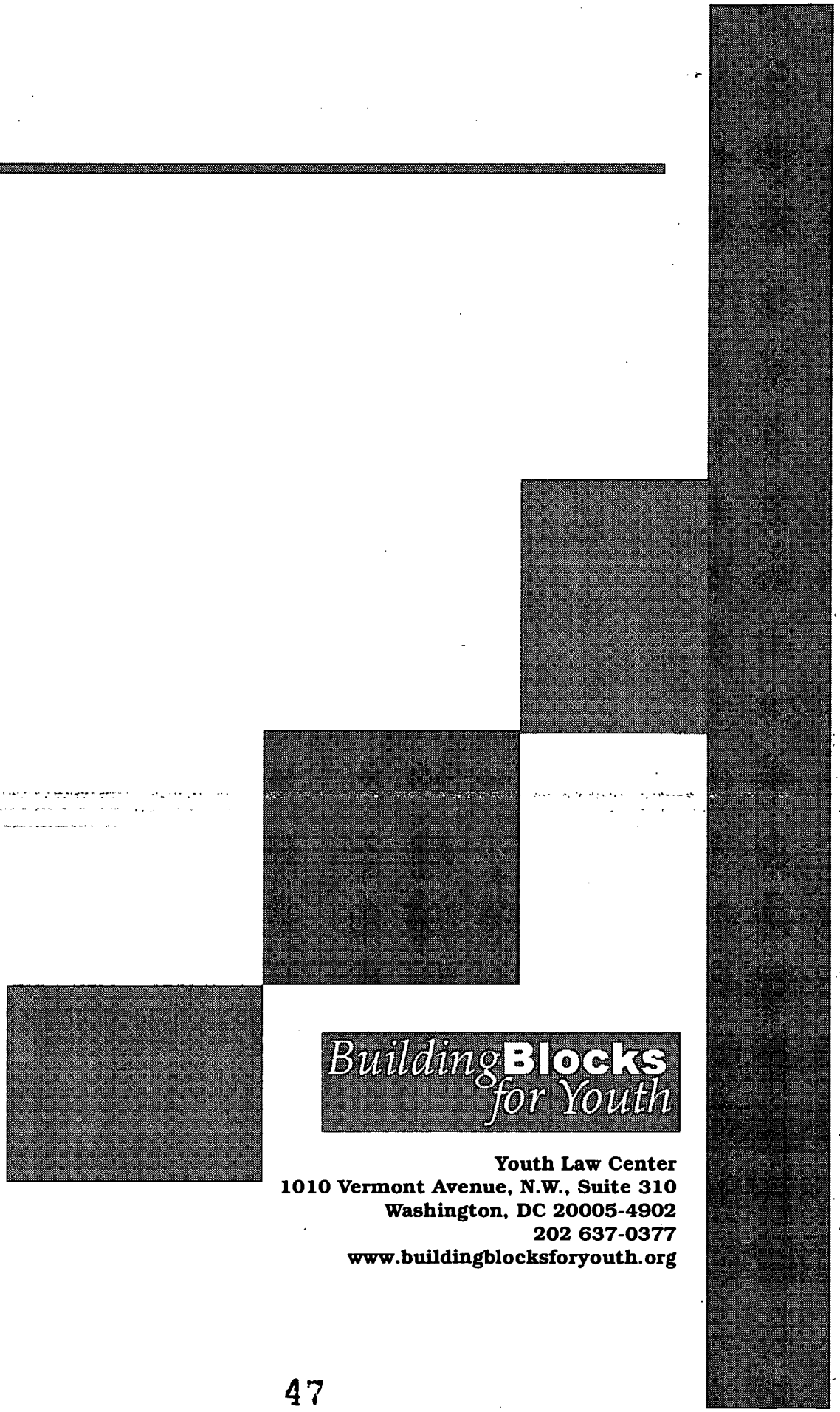
7 The focus groups were conducted from September, 1998, to November, 1998.

8 The poll was of 2,003 adults 18 or older living in the United States. It had a margin of sampling error of +/- 2.2%, and was conducted from January 30 to February 12, 1999.

9 Papers reporting this research are published together as "Reframing Youth Issues," Working Papers of the FrameWorks Institute and the Center for Communications and Community, UCLA. The research was analyzed in a paper, "Reframing Youth Issues for Public Consideration and Support: A FrameWorks Message Memo" by Susan Nall Bales, which was the source for comments on the FrameWorks research in this advocacy guide.

10 The question was split – half of respondents were asked to consider a Black youth and half were asked to consider a White youth.

11 In a second question, more than half of respondents strongly agreed that wealthier juveniles receive better treatment than poor juveniles.



Youth Law Center
1010 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Suite 310
Washington, DC 20005-4902
202 637-0377
www.buildingblocksforyouth.org

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
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